**To Spank or not to Spank: The Scientific Evidence About the Effects of Spanking Children as Punishment**

32 points for the primary response to the topic to be submitted inthe Drop Box for this module. Additional points for your comments on the topic and for each of two substantive replies to other students about their posting.

**Learning Objectives for this Assignment**

1. Locate and utilize peer-reviewed reserch journal articles on a specific topic

2. Compare personal views with the current state of knolwedge in the research literature on a controversial topic.

3. Synthesize several sources into a description of the current state of knowledge.

4. Compose and APA formatted reference for a research journal article.

5. Discuss a controversial topic with others who may arrive at different conclusions about a controversial topic.

Most parents in the United States use spanking as punishment for their children at least occasionally. Some refuse to use spanking. Spanking proponents and opponents tend to feel strongly about the justification and wisdom of their beliefs. Each usually believes that other approach is not as good for child development as their own. In other words, a spanking supporter will likely feel that a non-spanking parent is not doing as good a job of parenting as a spanking parent. Spanking opponents tend to believe that spanking is not necessary for healthy child development and has undesirable effects on children. The impact of spanking on children has been studied extensively in psychology over the last 25 years or so. What have we learned? What is the “current state of knowledge” about the effects of spanking on child development and behavior? Read ONE of the following resources (more is OK but not required) and then proceed to the new Forum with the same title: “The Current State of Knowledge…”

**Required Reading:**

Before reading the literature listed below, prime your thinking by perusing a few of the comments on this web site named “Helium: debates”:<http://www.helium.com/debates/65935-should-parents-use-corporal-punishment-to-discipline-children>

How can one decide which side of the controversy has the more reliable evidence? Will spanking improve my child’s behavior? How? Will my child be a better adult and citizen if I spank her/him? Summaries of the current state knowledge derived with scientific methods, published by mainstream peer-reviewed journals and/or posted on major psychology organizations’ web sites include:

Read one the three articles listed below:

1. The American Psychological Association press release on spanking which summarizes the meta-analysis by Gershoff listed in #4 below:

<http://www.apa.org/releases/spanking.html>

2. From The Association for Psychological Science (not the APA, but equally reliable scientific information on behavior) publication available on EBSCO:

Kazdin, A. E. & Benjet, C. (2003). Spanking children: Evidence and issues. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *12*, (3), 99-103.

3. From Harvard Medical School of Harvard University (this issue summarizes the meta-analysis by Gershoff in article #4 below):

Harvard University. (2002). The spanking debate. *Harvard Mental Health Letter, 19*, (5), 1-3.

**Optional reading**

The following APA peer-reviewed research journal article is the meta-analysis mentioned in all three of the above articles. It is available for free only though the link below or by searching the APA web site with the search word “spanking”. You do not need to read this, but looking at it will immediately help you see the difference between the original research article and the summaries posted in the other articles I listed for you. Of course, if you want to read it, you will learn even more, but I am not asking you to do this.

Gershoff, E. (2002). Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: a meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin, 128,* (4), 539-579.<http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/bul-1284539.pdf>

This is a 40 page meta-analysis of the research over many years. It is thorough and complex summary of the “state of knowledge”, and it is not required reading for you. One the above three articles will be sufficient for this assignment. There are commentaries on this lengthy article and other articles by other psychologists. Together, they provide a glimpse of the methods of the peer-reviewed science-based publication process as it critiques research before accepting that new knowledge is reliable enough to base decisions on.

4. Go to EBSCO or ProQuest and locate the one best article you can find that supports the benefits of spanking as a necessary disciplinary tactic for parents. You will need to summarize it and post an APA formatted reference.

**Your response to this assignment**

After reading one of the sources listed above, address the following points in your response to this topic. You must include significant points from the two articles in your response to earn full credit. The assignment is worth 30 points. Address each of the following issues:

1. (200-300 words; 10 points) Summarize the current state of knowledge based on the one required article you read above. Add any other articles you may have found in EBSCO or ProQuest that you wish to include, but this is not required.

2. (200-300 words; 10 points + 2 points for the APA formatted reference) Summarize the best source that you can find (an article or web site) that presents reliable scientific evidence that spanking children produces positive effects **other than** immediate behavioral compliance with a demand. Address the

* Do an EBSCO and/or ProQuest search for full-text articles on EBSCO using these subjects words: *corporal punishment AND children;* also, try *Spanking and children;* also try *physical punishment and children.* You will see lots of articles from newspapers, magazines, and peer-reviewed research journals.
* Now do a search using the same subject words but checking the peer-reviewed / scholarly box so you get only those articles and no mass media publications.
* Select the best evidence to support the benefits of spanking that you can find and summarize it along with a reference so we can locate it ourselves.

Tell us about this "best" article supporting the effectiveness of spanking, and include a reference that provides enough information for any of us (especially me) to locate it (APA format required; earns 2 points).

* How reliable and valid is this information compared to the required articles listed above? In other words, how much can you rely on this article to be accurate about the benefits of spanking in reality?
* How did you assess this validity? (e.g. peer-reviewed publication, reputation of the organization or individual, etc.)

3. (100-200 words; 5 points) Which side of the debate seems to have the more reliable scientifically derived evidence supporting it? To spank or not to spank? Explain your reasoning for this assessment. How do you decide which information to accept as most accurate?

4. (100-200 words; 5 points) How does the research evidence about the impact of spanking on children compare with your view of spanking children before this assignment?

* What effect does this research have upon your view? Has it conflicted with or supported your previous views about spanking?
* If someone's personal view conflicts with the research evidence, which should she/he consider applying in his/her personal life: the personal view or the research evidence? Explain your reasoning.
* One side of this controversy has much less evidence supporting it than does the other side. Why is this?

5. Reply substantively to at least two other students to earn 2 points each of two replies. Reply to more if you wish, but only 4 points can be earned.